

TAKE LIFE ON, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

Ensuring your kids get 60 minutes of physical activity a day can help prevent health issues as they grow up. Visit [www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk) for tips on getting your family active.



## Events Diary January

Courses run on Mondays or Tuesdays

### Mud Pies

Countesswells Woods, Aberdeen and  
Dunnottar Woods, Stonehaven

Mud Pies' courses offer kids and parents the chance to explore the outdoors no matter the weather. From exploring the woodland to outdoor games you are guaranteed to have fun.

Contact: [www.mudpieadventures.co.uk](http://www.mudpieadventures.co.uk)

### Various times

### Enjoy-A-Ball

### Across Scotland

Enjoy-a-Ball is a sports coaching programme for kids aged between three and nine. It aims to make children's first experiences of sports coaching happy and memorable.

Contact: <http://www.enjoy-a-ball.com/index.html>

### Everyday

### Swimming

### Edinburgh

Swimming is a great way to get active with your family and have fun. Free access to swimming pools at various locations across Edinburgh for all primary school children. Contact Local Leisure Centre.

### Mondays 5pm-6pm

### Killie Futures

### Grange Academy, Kilmarnock

Football coaching sessions available for five to seven year olds with Paul Macdonald local SFA community coach. Contact: [alanmahood@kilmarnockfc.co.uk](mailto:alanmahood@kilmarnockfc.co.uk). <http://www.kilmarnockfc.co.uk>

### Thursday, Friday & Saturday

### Street Football

### Various locations across East Renfrewshire

Cost free opportunity for 8-16 year olds to get involved in small sided football games as well as sample basketball and street hockey. Open to eight-16 years olds. Contact: [tommy.millar@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:tommy.millar@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk) / 0141 577 3923

### Saturday 19th at 7pm

### Lantern Lit Snowdrop Trail

### Finlaystone Country Estate, Langbank, Renfrewshire

Bring your lanterns and join the lantern & candle lit trail to see the snowdrops in moonlight. Hot drink included. Visit: <http://www.finlaystone.co.uk/news.htm>

### Saturday 22nd between 11am-3pm FREE

### Generations Games Fun Day

### Scotland Street School Museum, 225 Scotland Street, Glasgow, G5 8QB5

Jumbo-sized games for all the family to play together, as well as toy making, adventure games and a special grandparents and grandchildren's storytelling session. Contact: 0141 287 0500.

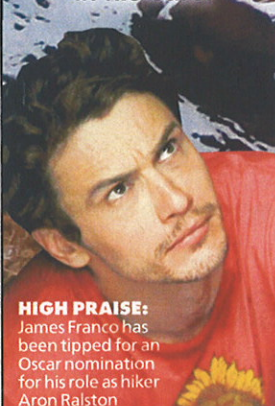
Tell us about events or activities you are organising at [takelifeon@consolidatedpr.com](mailto:takelifeon@consolidatedpr.com)

[www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk)

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF I dodged but at least



Movie director Danny Boyle's hit film 127 Hours tells the true story of hiker Aron Ralston's terrible experience in the vast, lonely canyons of the Utah desert. He had to hack off his right arm, which had been trapped by a falling boulder. Last year, Record writer Paul English travelled to Utah to hike alone through the desert canyons with Ralston's horrendous tale of survival ringing in his ears.



**HIGH PRAISE:** James Franco has been tipped for an Oscar nomination for his role as hiker Aron Ralston

**I wasn't the sort of conversation you want to have when you're about to set off alone into the vast Utah desert in the middle of winter.**

A woman in a Salt Lake City bar seemed to enjoy telling me about the perils of travelling solo through the state.

Mountain lions, bears, sub-zero temperatures, dehydration. She said it all with a sly smirk on her face, the way we tell them about the Loch Ness Monster and wild haggis.

The hike to Delicate Arch, the giant natural structure at the end of a moderate hill walk, would be tricky with all the snow, she said, adding: "Especially with those boots on."

She was joking, I figured. Then came the warning about the guy who wandered into the desert on his own, slipped and had a boulder fall on his arm, an arm he had to amputate with a penknife to stay alive.

There was no sly smile for this one.

That night in my hotel, I searched online and discovered it was true.

Film-maker Danny Boyle was working on a tale of survival against unimaginable odds as encountered by one man who ventured into the Utah desert and didn't tell anyone precisely where he was going.

Now I was about to do the very same thing. I'd been skiing for a week in the mountains around Salt Lake City, but had planned a 1000-mile solo road trip to witness one of nature's most awesome spectacles.

I admit I was a bit nervous. I'd never driven in the US before and on a previous group expedition through the unforgiving deserts of western Texas, I'd been well-drilled in the importance of back-up while driving on empty desert roads.

My friend Stephanie in Texas had warned me to pack a sleeping bag, lots of water and something to set the spare tyre alight with should I get stranded. My mobile



phone should work, she said. Some of the time.

Days from home, with no one really sure where I was, and driving for long hours with nothing more than coyotes, vultures, snow-battling cowboys and the occasional trucker as signs of life, this was as remote as I had ever been in my life.

An iPod and the posh man in the sat-nav were my only company. And the voice of that woman in the bar.

Utah might be best-known for the exaggerations of Mormon lifestyle - nine wives, no beer - but it also has the stunning views on the drive south to Monument Valley, one of the most scenic journeys on earth.

Travelling south on Interstate 15, I headed for the town of Moab, near Canyonlands and Arches National Parks. I met a man from Dundee who ran a small organic bakery, and a woman from northern England who left home to marry a Navajo man.

These strangers, and someone in an office in Salt Lake City, were the only people who knew my next moves, and even they couldn't be precise. To anyone at home, I was in the Utah desert. Not exactly directions for a rescue mission. After visits to the meandering canyon of

**'The prints hadn't been there**

# HORROR TREK THAT BECAME A MOVIE I dodged but at least



**SUMMIT SPECIAL:** Paul reaches his goal of Delicate Arch after the scenic splendour of Monument Valley, left



Gooseneck Point, I spent a night in the mind-bending Monument Valley and its vast skies, open plains and giant buttes and mesas, the backdrop of many a John Wayne movie.

Early the next day, I spun north back to Moab, reaching Newspaper Rock, which is covered with 2000-year-old carvings. I saw no one for hours as I drove north to Dead Horse Point in Canyonlands National Park, where Hollywood's famous road-trippers, Thelma and Louise, met their cliff-top demise.

The viewpoint offered endless "other-worldly" vistas and I stood alone, mesmerised for what might have been an hour as the sun dropped behind the canyons and the place took on the appearance of a moonscape in the soft dusk.

**BEARS hibernate at this time of year, I reassured myself. Mountain lions, though?**

The next morning, I set off early for Arches National Park, a collection of surreal sandstone structures. It was here I faced my solo challenge - hiking up a hill in the snow to have my photograph taken with the prize at the top - Delicate Arch, the symbol

next to you. Jogging is not recommended, especially alone. Travel in groups. If you see a lion: Stop. Do not run. Stand tall. If attacked, FIGHT BACK."

There was no question of running. My light-weight hiking boots weren't gripping on the patchy snow as I spotted two men up ahead. They would be my group whether they liked it or not. I followed them for almost three hours, never letting them out of shouting distance should I have to "fight back" against a mountain lion. I'd come this far. I wasn't turning back now.

I made it to Delicate Arch just as the pair were heading down, and asked one of them to take my photo.

I sat alone at the top, surveying the frosty rocks and canyons around me, totally charged and thoroughly invigorated.

The descent was tricky because my boots weren't up to scrambling across snowy rock. But I only lost my footing a couple of times, suffering nothing more serious than a skinned hand. I didn't have to chop it off.

But I did see large paw prints crossing my ascending boot prints. They hadn't been there 90 minutes before, and they sent shudders down my spine.

The woman at the information centre at the entrance to the national park told me they might have been lion tracks, as one had been spotted the week before.

But they were most likely from a coyote.

Aron Ralston has a permanent reminder of his ill-advised hiking trip through the canyons - a missing right arm.

Thankfully, all I have to remind me of my days alone in the Utah desert are memories and stunning photographs.

**ROCKS AND A HARD PLACE:** Record writer Paul English braved the unforgiving Utah desert on a solo hike

**90 minutes before and sent shudders down my spine'**